

House of Dreams

by J.A. Pak

“Look, Megan, look,” Penny said, tugging at Megan's sleeve. Megan was creaming butter and didn't want to be disturbed, but Penny insisted. Megan put the bowl down and followed Penny into the front hallway. Kitty was immersed in bejeweled sunshine, the hallway glowing with the afternoon sun filtering through stained glass windows.

“See,” Penny said. “Kitty's found our spot.”

“So she has.”

Kitty's silky body was limp, outrageously contented. It was a luxury that couldn't be resisted. Megan put the bowl of butter in the refrigerator. She brought pillows and blankets. With Kitty, they spent the rest of the afternoon napping under the changing arc of sunlight.

For a long time Megan did not dream. She was enjoying too much the sunlight tingling her skin, a wisp of hair falling slowly across her right cheek. The weight of the blanket and the cushion of air nestling between her skin and blanket were delicious. In her mind these were not separate things, but one sensation, unmingled and pure. She could hear the cat purring, the grandfather clock ticking, a comforting voice stored a week ago, herself laughing as a child, all things one and unresolved.

The cat wound itself around Megan's neck, its purring curling through Megan's consciousness. She was the cat and then herself, both things at once. Penny was calling to her, her voice near. She followed it, down the hallway, into the kitchen and then into another, unfamiliar room. Funny, she thought, I've never been in this part of the house before. The cat had been following her all along and now jumped up on top of a shelf. Penny was pointing. High up, resting on the shelf, was a magnificent miniature house, opened with all its rooms displayed. The rooms were meticulously decorated, so lifelike with their miniature curtains, silk wallpaper, tiny wood furniture. Megan reached up to it, urged on by Penny.

“Isn't it a wonderful house? It's yours if you want it.”

Megan looked at the real estate agent, nodding, agreeing it was a hidden treasure and that Megan was amazingly lucky to get this chance.

“It's what I've always wanted,” she said. She reached for the house, but it was high, just out of Megan's reach.

“Go inside,” the agent urged her.

“But I—” She was so confused. She should go inside, but how could she? There was something wrong, but no one seemed to understand. She herself didn't understand why she couldn't reach the house, why she couldn't go inside.

“Don't you want to take a look?” the agent persisted. She was impatient, angry.

Megan reached up again, strained to reach the shelf. There—she was hanging from the shelf, shrunken to fit the house. Now she understood. Only she didn't have the strength—she was dangling. She continued to struggle, afraid to fall, struggling to pull herself up, out of danger—

She woke up fretting, inconsolable. Her muscles ached. It was dark in the hallway. She felt very alone. These things with the haunting ability to disturb did not leave Megan easily. She couldn't put aside the dream.

